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Press Release | Contact: Danielle Langone (202) 225-6416

WASHINGTON, DC—Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) announced today that \$60.4 million in disaster aid for the commercial salmon fishers and communities hard hit by last year's virtual closure of the coastal salmon fishing season has been included in the Emergency Supplemental funding bill. In January, DeFazio introduced legislation that would have provided this assistance, and sent a letter to House and Senate leadership urging them to provide this assistance via any legislative means possible. He has been fighting for assistance since the fishery closures were announced last year.

“This disaster assistance will make a world of difference to members of fishing communities all along the coast, many of whom lost their way of life and main source of income with the widespread fishery closures,” DeFazio said. “I am pleased the Democratic leadership heard the calls of my colleagues and me who have been asking for disaster assistance for almost a year. The next step is to find long-term solutions to improve the health of the Klamath River to prevent similar closures in the future, and maintain the fishing way of life.”

In late June 2006, DeFazio and other coastal members of Congress forced a meeting with Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez to inform him of the dire situation salmon fishers faced, and to press him to declare the West Coast Salmon season a disaster. A week later, Secretary Gutierrez declared a partial disaster declaration for the fishing season. Since then, DeFazio and his colleagues have been urging House and Senate leaders to appropriate funds for disaster assistance, including staging a protest on the House floor last year to force the then-Republican majority to include some disaster assistance in a funding bill.